

COLUMBIA MISSOURIAN

Volunteers train for new visitors center

By [Becky Neems](#)

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COLUMBIA — Maryam Lotfibabarood would like to share her knowledge of places to visit in Columbia by spending her free time volunteering.

She said she appreciates the nature and wildlife of Columbia because of its contrast to Iran's largest city.

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Lotfibabarood is originally from Tehran, the capital of Iran, and has been living in Columbia for 10 months. On Wednesday morning she trained to become a volunteer at the new city visitors center at the Daniel Boone City Building.

She came to Columbia because her husband received a degree in Iran but wanted to continue his education in the U.S. He is now in his sixth year at MU pursuing a doctorate in physics.

The center is looking for volunteers such as Lotfibabarood to join the Columbia Hospitality Corps to help staff the center, which is set to open Aug. 31.

“I can help others and myself and can be entertained,” she said.

She said she saw the need for volunteers at the new visitors center from the Columbia Hospitality Corps’ website and attended Wednesday's meeting to learn about the changes from the center's original location at Lake of the Woods.

Leigh Britt, who works with the Columbia Volunteer Program, said the activities of the volunteers will be much more visible at the Boone Building because city employees, the mayor and other citizens entering the building will see their work.

Starting in March 2013, the center will participate in the Certified Tourism Ambassador network, which will require volunteers to be certified through online lessons specific to Columbia. The volunteers will be able to communicate with other tourism volunteers throughout the 31 cities across the country that have the program in place, Britt said.

Having the center at the Boone Building will centralize the program, and Britt said having a location near the three college campuses in Columbia might provide an opportunity to gain student volunteers.

Nine people attended the meeting on Wednesday, six of whom have volunteered for the Lake of the Woods center.

The Columbia Hospitality Corps will host additional training meetings from 6 to 9 p.m. Sept. 5 in the mezzanine conference room of the Boone Building and from 6 to 9 p.m. Oct. 25 in Room 1A.

Supervising editor is [Zach Murdock](#).